# MASSACHUSETTS CONGREGATIONAL HISTORY

# AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE

# MASSACHUSETTS CONFERENCE, UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

John Adams Whipple Photo
Congregational delegates from around the United States gather around
Plymouth Rock in Plymouth, Massachusetts on June 22, 1865,
after the Burial Hill Declaration of their Congregational faith
was presented on Plymouth's nearby Burial Hill.

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The cover image is of **Congregationalism's Famous Burial Hill Declaration** ~ John Adams Whipple photo at National Congregational Council at Plymouth Rock, June 22, 1865 at the Metropolitan Museum, New York - [Metropolitan Museum of Art]:
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# EVOLUTION OF THE MASSACHUSETTS CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Like a strong rope of many strands, the modern **MASSACHUSETTS CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST** evolved from the following four Massachusetts Congregational groups, which were finally all entwined together in a **1928** merger:

**1.** The **MASSACHUSETTS [HOME] MISSIONARY SOCIETY** was founded in **1799** for interested clergy and laity. In **1827** it merged with **[2]** and focused on aiding Massachusetts Congregational churches. It also funded mission work outside the Commonwealth, through its affiliation with the American Home Missionary Society. The word "Home" was added to its name in **1844** to indicate its work was not in a foreign land.

**2.** The **DOMESTIC MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF MASSACHUSETTS [PROPER]** was founded in **1818** for clergy in the General Association of Massachusetts and for interested laity. Short-lived, in **1827** it took on the name of **[1]** in merging with it.

**3.** The **GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF MASSACHUSETTS [PROPER]** was founded in **1802/1803** for Calvinistic Congregational clergy in the Commonwealth. It dropped the word "Proper" from its name, after Maine became its own state in **1820**. Over the years, this group became very influential in the life of Massachusetts Congregational churches.

**4.** The **GENERAL CONFERENCE OF CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES IN MASSACHUSETTS** was founded in **1860** for laity and clergy delegates from area Conferences [now Associations].

~ Short-lived, in **1868** it merged with **[3]** to form the **GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES OF MASSACHUSETTS**.

~ In **1910**, this group changed its name to the **MASSACHUSETTS CONGREGATIONAL CONFERENCE**.

~ In **1928**, the merger of **[1/2]** with **[3/4]** created the **MASSACHUSETTS CONGREGATIONAL CONFERENCE AND MISSIONARY SOCIETY**.

After denominational mergers on the national level, this group changed its name.

~ In **1953**, it became the **MASSACHUSETTS CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE.**

~ In **1966**, it became the **MASSACHUSETTS CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**.

# Did You Know That...?

.....The General Court of Massachusetts has been called the **FIRST MISSIONARY SOCIETY of PROTESTANT CHRISTENDOM**? This court was provided for in the 1629 English charter which created the Massachusetts Bay Company. Led by John Winthrop, this company founded the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which operated essentially as a commercial trading enterprise until 1684. The Bay Colony's General Court oversaw the gathering of new Congregational churches within the colony. It also called for the Cambridge Synod which created **THE CAMBRIDGE PLATFORM** in 1648. This famous Platform sought to clarify issues of church government and discipline for the "New England Way," in part to protect the autonomy of New England's Congregational churches from Presbyterian challenges.

.....Historically, the Congregational churches in Massachusetts tended to be more **INDEPENDENT** than their sister churches in Connecticut? This is reflected in Connecticut's acceptance of the **SAYBROOK PLATFORM** in 1708 which provided for the existence of Consociations. In a Presbyterian-like way, those Consociations could exercise some ecclesiastical control over local Congregational churches and their clergy; whereas, efforts at that time in Massachusetts to adopt the same were thwarted. Reflective of this difference, Connecticut Congregationalists formed the first state-wide organization of Congregational ministers in 1709. It was almost another century before Massachusetts Congregationalists did the same, in their creation of the General Association of Massachusetts Proper in 1802/1803.

.....The **MASSACHUSETTS MISSIONARY SOCIETY** was founded in 1799 primarily by **HOPKINSIANS**? They were conservative Calvinists who ascribed to the views of **REV. SAMUEL HOPKINS** (1721-1803), who served in **GREAT BARRINGTON**, then in Newport, Rhode Island. Hopkins had been a student of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), whose "New England Theology" Hopkins further developed. Hopkins stressed "disinterested benevolence," the doing of deeds for the greatest good of all beings, sacrificing one's own welfare, if necessary. Hopkins was known for saying that true Christians should be willing to be damned for the glory of God. Hopkins stressed conversions and missionary work, as important ways to prepare for God's coming Kingdom. Hopkins believed that Kingdom would gradually begin to appear, once the 19th century began. Hopkins was a social reformer and one of the first Congregationalists to speak out against slavery, which was very courageous, as Newport was a center of the slave trade.

.....Although unintended, **INTERDENOMINATIONAL CO-OPERATION** was said to have caused Congregationalists to **LOSE 2,000 [!] CHURCHES** in states beyond the Hudson River, as our country expanded? Modern historians consider that estimated number "excessive." Nonetheless, a great many churches were lost. In 1801, Congregational ministers in Connecticut [who were already inclined toward Presbyterianism], entered into the **PLAN OF UNION** with the Presbyterian General Assembly, to spread the gospel out west. To conserve resources in frontier settlements, this Plan allowed Presbyterian and Congregational clergy to serve either type of church, and churches of either type were allowed to affiliate with the other denomination's general association or presbytery in their area. In actual practice, many fledgling frontier churches gravitated to the stronger, more centralized structure offered by presbyteries. Unfortunately, at that time many Congregationalists in New England were also doubtful that the independence so characteristic of their churches, was well suited to frontier life. In 1837, conservative, "Old School" Presbyterians withdrew from this Plan, due to their concerns about

emerging liberal trends within Congregationalism. Finally realizing their many loses, and beginning to see themselves as a national denomination, Congregationalists themselves rejected this Plan, when they met at their first national convention, held in Albany, New York in 1852. Grieving the loss of so many churches, one Congregationalist is said to have complained: *"They have milked our Congregational cows, but have made nothing but Presbyterian butter and cheese."*

.....**20** of the first **25** Congregational churches gathered in Massachusetts are said to have left **TRINITARIANISM** and become **UNITARIAN** in the early 19th century? Up through 1833, church and state were not separate in Massachusetts, and many of the Commonwealth's Congregational churches were still supported by public tax dollars. Since 1780, Commonwealth law held that there would be *"no taxation without representation"* in religious matters. Thus, from a legal point of view, towns--not church bodies themselves--owned the church buildings and had the right to select the ministers their tax dollars supported. In eastern Massachusetts, townspeople often sympathized with a liberal interpretation of the Christian faith, which came to be known as Unitarianism. Yet, many Congregational church members still adhered to the Trinitarian Calvinism of early Congregationalism. When such theological differences became an issue, the town [or the ecclesiastical Society or Parish representing the town] had the law on its side. It's been estimated that by 1840, about 96 Massachusetts Congregational churches had passed over into Unitarianism, while another 30 Parish committees were keeping Trinitarian preaching out of their meeting houses. Some Congregational churches made the transition to Unitarianism smoothly. A number of Congregational congregations withdrew, willingly or under pressure, from their town's meeting house in which they had long worshipped, in order to maintain their Trinitarianism. In the midst of this great difficulty, which was sometimes contested bitterly, the **GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF MASSACHUSETTS** became a haven and strong support for Trinitarian Congregational clergy and the interests of their churches.

.....From its beginning in 1802, the **GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF MASSACHUSETTS** specified in its By-laws, that the articles of faith "generally expressed" in the **WESTMINISTER ASSEMBLY'S SHORTER CATECHISM** were the "basis of union and fellowship" for the clergy who made up its membership? This catechism was staunchly Calvinistic and used for centuries in American Congregational churches both to summarize and teach their basic beliefs. Created in 1646, this catechism grew out of **THE CONFESSION OF FAITH OF THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY OF DIVINES**. That Assembly met at Westminster Abbey from 1643 to 1652. It was called into being by the British Parliament, when Parliament was under the control of Puritans. By explicitly espousing this Trinitarian catechism, the General Association essentially set itself apart from those more "liberal" Congregational clergy in Massachusetts, who eventually became known as Unitarians. The General Association continued to cite this Shorter Catechism in its By-laws until the year 1868, when it merged with the General Conference of Congregational Churches in Massachusetts. In its By-laws, this newly merged organization had a much more general statement of its faith basis, which made no explicit reference to the Shorter Catechism.

.....In the early 19th century, Congregational clergy in the **BERKSHIRE ASSOCIATION** of ministers strongly criticized one of their colleagues and his church for wishing to sever their relationship after a **SHORT PASTORATE** of only **TEN YEARS?** Called to meet with that church and its minister in a dismissing Ecclesiastical Council, those clergy noted that such *"...quick changes made for spiritual weakness in both the community and the ministry."*

.....The **MACUCC** was indebted to the clergy and churches in **BROOKFIELD** and **SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES** on two counts? The Brookfield Association of Congregational clergy was formed on June 22, 1757– one of the earliest Congregational clergy groups in the Commonwealth. In 1802, this clergy Association initiated and led the effort to form the **GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF MASSACHUSETTS PROPER**. Years later, on June 13, 1821, this same Brookfield Association welcomed lay representatives from their churches into their membership, at which point the group's name was changed to the Brookfield Associational Conference. This new organization of clergy and lay church representatives was **the FIRST ASSOCIATION** [then called a "Conference"] in Massachusetts Congregationalism. In 1827, a creed was written for the churches in this Conference. In 1887, this Conference divided to form two separate organizations: the Brookfield Conference for area churches and their clergy and a Brookfield area minister's group. That Brookfield Conference became part of the **CENTRAL ASSOCIATION**, one of eleven such Associations in the MACUCC in 2002.

.....**DR. NATHANAEL EMMONS (1745-1840)**, a key founder and longtime first President of the **MASSACHUSETTS MISSIONARY SOCIETY** held that Congregational churches should be **PURE DEMOCRACIES**, in which all members have an equal vote in church matters? This contrasted with the aristocratic views of many earlier Congregationalists--particularly in the 1600's--who believed that important church decisions should be left to a church's clergy and officers. Emmons was a very influential Hopkinsian Calvinist, who trained upwards of one hundred Congregational clergy in his home, during his more than fifty years at the Congregational church in **FRANKLIN**. Emmons was so protective of local church autonomy, that he adamantly opposed the formation of any state-wide clergy groups. Ironically, he refused to join the newly created General Association of Massachusetts Proper, claiming that: *"Associationism leads to Consociationism; Consociationism leads to Presbyterianism; Presbyterianism leads to Episcopacy; Episcopacy leads to Roman Catholicism; and Roman Catholicism is an ultimate fact."* Deferring to Emmons' unbending view on this, his local **MENDON** Association of Congregational clergy, patiently waited until after Emmons' death, before they joined the General Association of Massachusetts. By then, the General Association was almost four decades old!

.....The older brother of **NATHAN HALE**, the Revolutionary War hero, was a very important figure in the early years of the General Association of Massachusetts Proper? Nathan and his older [by one year] brother, Enoch, entered Yale College together. Nathan became a teacher, then a soldier during the war, and was hanged by the British as a spy. Enoch became a Congregational minister, serving the Congregational church at **WESTHAMPTON**. For twenty years (!), from 1804 to 1824, **REV. ENOCH HALE** served as the General Association's first Secretary--at that time, the Association's key leadership position and only position, to be served continuously by the same person.

.....In 1810, **BEVERLY** was the site of the **FIRST SABBATH SCHOOL** held in **MASSACHUSETTS**? This school was held in the home "on the corner of Davis and Front streets," owned by a Mrs. Prince. The school met both Sunday mornings and after Sunday afternoon church services. Mrs. Prince's daughter, Joanna, and Hannah Hill were the young Congregational women who taught this class. Their class contained about thirty scholars who read and recited scripture. Typical of early Congregationalism, the Westminister Assembly's Shorter Catechism was a primary text used in their religious instruction.This school is said to have moved into Beverly's **DANE STREET CHURCH** meeting house about 1819. On September 5, 1860, this Sabbath School celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. By 1817, a number of Massachusetts Congregational churches began to have

sabbath schools associated with them. Initially, some church families were not in favor of such schools, because they met on the sabbath--the day set aside for rest.

.....At the 1821 ordination of Dr. Benjamin Wisner at the **OLD SOUTH CHURCH** in Boston, about 31% of the $463 cost of entertaining guests--including the lodging of clergy--was spent on **WINE** and **SPIRITS**? Such use of alcohol was generally acceptable at the time. However, within a few short years a dramatic shift toward **TEMPERANCE** took place in the thinking of many Massachusetts Congregationalists. In 1827, the recently formed **SUFFOLK SOUTH CONFERENCE OF CHURCHES**, of which Old South Church was a member, called upon its clergy and delegates to inform their churches of the **DUTY** of **ABSTAINING** from the use of intoxicating liquors. From this time on, the abuse of alcohol became a primary concern of many Congregationalists, including those in Massachusetts.

.....At an 1836 meeting, the **WOBURN ASSOCIATION** of Congregational ministers debated this question: *"Has the majority of the church a right to change or alter any* **CREED** *or* **COVENANT** *on which the church was constituted?"* The following year, 1837, this Association debated the question: *"Is there anything in Scripture to sanction the conferring or the receiving of the* **TITLE** *of* **DOCTOR of DIVINITY***?"* By 1883, the Association's concern turned to this question for debate: *"Is there any* **PROBATION** *after the present life?*"

.....In 1842, a local Association of Massachusetts Congregational ministers, sought to **SILENCE** their colleagues in the General Association of Massachusetts on the subject of **SLAVERY**? By unanimous vote, that local clergy group maintained that *"slavery is not a subject which comes within the cognizance of the General Association, that all action of the Association tends only to evil among ourselves as well as among our brethren at the South."* At their annual meeting the following year in **SUNDERLAND**, the General Association rejected that view, saying: *"...instead of silence or inaction, on the subject of American Slavery, we deem it our duty and privilege as ministers and christians (sic), to speak freely, openly, with earnestness and in kindness, and to act in the same spirit, for the relief of our oppressed and suffering countrymen and christian brethren."* At that same meeting, the General Association also expressed its *"ardent desire"* that clergy and churches everywhere *"...will put forth every appropriate christian effort to effect the termination of slavery in all lands."*

.....When more than 500 Congregational deacons and clergy from across the United States held a **JUNE 1865 CONVENTION** in **BOSTON**, soon after the Civil War ended and President Lincoln had been assassinated, it was only the third time since 1620 that American Congregationalists had held such a major gathering. On June 22, delegates to that Convention traveled by train down to **PLYMOUTH** and assembled on Plymouth's Burial Hill to hear a new faith statement. That statement, known as the **BURIAL HILL DECLARATION**, was not meant to be a creed or a test to be imposed on anyone. Instead, it was meant to be a statement of the beliefs which Congregationalists of their day generally held in common. That statement began with these words: *"Standing by the rock where the Pilgrims set foot upon these shores, upon the spot where they worshipped God, and among the graves of the early generations, we, Elders and Messengers of the Congregational churches of the United States in National Council assembled,— like them acknowledging no rule of faith but the word of God, — do now declare our adherence to the faith and order of the apostolic and primitive churches held by our fathers, and substantially as embodied in the confessions and platforms which our Synods of 1648 and 1680 set forth or reaffirmed."* In 1865, many Congregationalists were deeply aware of their debt to

the **PILGRIMS** and **OTHER PURITANS** who came after them, for both the Congregational faith and the form of church government which those early settlers brought to these shores.

.....The Conference's **THE CHURCH OF THE PILGRIMAGE** in **PLYMOUTH** initiated a chain of events which led to the creation of the **NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES OF THE UNITED STATES** in 1871? Compared to some other denominations, Congregationalism was slow to develop a national consciousness in America. This National Council and its triennial meetings was the first continuing body on the national level, to represent American Congregationalism as a whole. It was a forerunner of our modern United Church of Christ and its biannual General Synod meetings. Anticipating the 250th anniversary of the landing of the "Mayflower" at Plymouth, the Church of the Pilgrimage invited Congregational church representatives to a March 1870 meeting in New York, to discuss suitable ways to celebrate that special anniversary. That meeting led to an April 1870 "Pilgrim Memorial Convention" in Chicago, for Congregational church representatives. That Convention called for the creation of a permanent National Council. Thereupon, the General Association of Ohio brought committees representing Congregationalism's state organizations together for a December 1870 meeting in Boston. Deciding that the churches really wanted a National Council, this Boston assembly arranged for its creation. They scheduled the Council's first meeting for November 15, 1871 in Oberlin, Ohio. They also set up a special committee to propose a constitution for this new Council. This committee was chaired by **REV. DR. ALONZO QUINT**, a highly respected Congregational minister serving in **NEW BEDFORD**. As it happened, 276 delegates from 25 U.S. states and territories attended this historic, first National Council meeting in Oberlin.

.....In 1876 and 1878, at its annual meetings in **LOWELL** and **FALL RIVER**, respectively, the General Association of the Congregational Churches of Massachusetts, recommended that all Congregational churches in the Commonwealth use only the **UNFERMENTED JUICE** of the **GRAPE** at the communion table? This was part of the Association's efforts to encourage temperance. In 1882, German scientist, Robert Koch discovered the microbe which caused tuberculosis, giving support to the idea that diseases are caused by germs. Coupled together, these developments soon led Congregational churches in Massachusetts and elsewhere to begin using small, **INDIVIDUAL COMMUNION CUPS**--for sanitary reasons. Prior to this, Congregationalists often used common cups in this sacrament.

.....The Conference's **ARMENIAN CHURCH of the MARTYRS** in **WORCESTER**, gathered in 1892, is said to be the **OLDEST ARMENIAN CHURCH in AMERICA**? From this congregation, Armenian Protestantism eventually spread to other Massachusetts communities, such as **LAWRENCE** and **CAMBRIDGE**, and beyond. Many of the churches in this movement identified themselves with Congregationalism. The movement is said to have begun in a prayer meeting in the Worcester home of a young Armenian man named Yazijian. He was in the first group of Armenians brought over to America about 1881, to work for Worcester's American Steel and Wire Company.

.....The **FIRST FEMALE CONGREGATIONAL MINISTER** to be ordained by a Congregational council in **NEW ENGLAND** was **AMELIA ADELAIDE FROST**? Amelia was ordained on February 14, 1894 at the Congregational church of **LITTLETON**. Amelia was initially ordained to serve as Assistant Pastor in the church, to help her husband, the Pastor, who was ill. After he returned from time away overseas, with no improvement in his health, Amelia was installed as Pastor of the church.

Amelia served in that position for five years and was very well respected by her parishioners. As she prepared to leave them in 1900, they commended her highly, saying: *"Her influence has been of the highest nature and we feel will remain with us..."*

.....At the 1900 Annual Meeting of the General Association held at the **FIRST CHURCH in AMHERST**, it was reported, on the basis of a survey, that many Massachusetts Congregational clergy were now more interested in **CHRISTIAN EDUCATION** and **NURTURE**, than in securing conversion experiences? This signaled a significant and growing change in the Commonwealth's Congregationalism, which in the past had often stressed the importance of **CONVERSION EXPERIENCES of GOD'S SAVING GRACE** and the value of **REVIVALS** to help facilitate such experiences. By the 1640's, Congregational churches in the Massachusetts Bay Colony had taken the step--then innovative for Congregationalists--of requiring such a conversion experience for church membership. Down through the centuries, many Congregational churches in the Commonwealth had set up such an entrance requirement for their members. This was especially true of Congregational churches which were more Calvinistic and conservative in their faith understanding. It's been said that 1680, 1727, 1740, 1755, 1790, 1800, 1811, 1823, 1843, and 1858 were remarkable years for revivals in Massachusetts. In 1860, the General Conference of Congregational Churches in Massachusetts [which soon after merged with the General Association] created a "Committee on Home Evangelization" to "more thoroughly evangelize every portion of the Commonwealth." As this committee evolved, it encouraged local Conferences [Associations] of Congregational churches, to assist their own churches in sponsoring revivals. One result of this encouragement, was that in 1887 the **MENDON CONFERENCE** employed an **EVANGELIST** to conduct revivals in ten of its Conference churches, located in: **NORFOLK, FRANKLIN, MANSFIELD, FOXBORO, MEDFIELD, WALPOLE, MEDWAY VILLAGE, WEST MEDWAY, MILFORD,** and **MILLIS**. About 300 conversions were said to have come out of these revivals, including the conversions of a number of young men, which was celebrated. Horace Bushnell's stress on Christian nurture, Charles Darwin's "Theory of Evolution," "Higher Criticism" in biblical studies, the "Social Gospel" movement, and other factors then emerging, contributed to the dramatic decrease of interest in revivals and conversion experiences, which was now evident in 1900, among many of the Commonwealth's Congregational clergy.

.....Up to the turn of the 20th century it had long been the practice in Massachusetts [as well as throughout New England] for the **MINISTERIAL STANDING** of Congregational clergy to be held by local groups of Congregational clergy [known then as Associations], not by groups which represented the Congregational churches [then known as Conferences]? However, outside New England, ministerial standing was usually held by the local Congregational groups which represented the churches. In 1886, the National Council of Congregational Churches of the United States, meeting in Chicago, resolved that *"Congregational ministerial standing should be lodged in our associations or conferences of churches."* This resolution affirmed the practice outside New England, which many believed was more in keeping with the spirit of Congregationalism. In response to the National Council's call, the **BROOKFIELD ASSOCIATION OF MINISTERS** took a dramatic and unique step within Massachusetts Congregationalism. In 1888 they freely and completely transferred their *"duty of certifying to the ministerial standing of Congregational ministers within our bounds"* to the **BROOKFIELD CONFERENCE OF CHURCHES**--the local group representing their Congregational churches. A similar thing was done in this period, by the Congregational clergy groups in New Hampshire. Finally, at its 1901 Annual Meeting held in **ANDOVER**, the General Association of Congregational Churches of Massachusetts passed a resolution urging all Congregational ministerial

Associations in the Commonwealth to make such a transfer. Some of these clergy groups made this transfer relatively quickly; a few held onto their ministerial standing responsibility for years, before finally transferring it.

.....In Massachusetts Congregationalism, the Massachusetts Conference used to be an **"ASSOCIATION,"** and the Associations used to be **"CONFERENCES"**? This complete **REVERSAL in NAMES** came about, following the 1907 meeting of the National Council of the Congregational Churches of the United States, in Cleveland, Ohio. This national meeting called for the standardization of terminology in American Congregationalism--a sign of its growing "national consciousness." Up to this time, there was considerable variety in the names of Congregational bodies, from region to region. Thus, in 1910 Massachusetts' General Association changed its name to the **MASSACHUSETTS CONGREGATIONAL CONFERENCE**. And over time, all the local Conferences in Massachusetts took on the name "Association," instead of "Conference."

.....Massachusetts Congregationalists were among the last to form a **STATE CONFERENCE**? Such conferences were legally incorporated bodies. They usually had a general superintendent and cared for all self-sustaining churches and missionary churches in their region. Congregationalists in Wisconsin, Nebraska, Michigan, Northern California, and Ohio were the first to form such state conferences. Beginning in 1900, efforts were made to bring the loosely organized General Association of the Congregational Churches of Massachusetts together with the Massachusetts Home Missionary Society. In 1906, members of the General Association were made voting members of the Missionary Society. In its work of aiding struggling Congregational churches in Massachusetts, the Missionary Society handled considerable amounts of money; it had long had its own Secretary. In 1925, the Society's Secretary was made an executive president and given the responsibility of protecting the denomination's religious interests in the Commonwealth, as well as representing the Commonwealth's Congregational churches, particularly in national Congregational circles. Finally, in May 1927 at the **FIRST (OLD SOUTH) CHURCH in WORCESTER**, both groups voted to merge under the charter of the Missionary Society. In 1928, the **MASSACHUSETTS CONGREGATIONAL CONFERENCE and MISSIONARY SOCIETY** was finally formed as a legal entity. At the time of this merger, the Missionary Society had $1.4 million in permanent funds, of which about $900,000 had come from the estate of **JOSEPH M.** and **SUSAN F. STONE**. The Stones apparently came to appreciate the Society's work, when their own church in **NORTH ANDOVER** received Society aid over the course of nine years.

.....The **CRAIGVILLE CONFERENCE CENTER** on Cape Cod, eventually came to be used by the Massachusetts Conference, partly as a result of the **1931 MERGER** of Congregationalists with the **CHRISTIAN DENOMINATION**? The Christian Camp Meeting Association which oversees Craigville was first organized in 1872. At first, this campground was primarily used by members of the Christian Church denomination, which had some churches in Rhode Island and Southeastern Massachusetts. In 1960, the Massachusetts Conference gladly accepted that Association's offer to use Craigville. At the time of the 1931 merger, there were about 100,000 Christian church members and 900,000 Congregational church members. These two denominations had tried to merge before, but that effort was rejected in 1898, by members of the Christian denomination---particularly by those members outside New England.

.....The merger of the Congregational and Christian churches and their respective youth departments on

the national level helped stimulate a strong youth movement, which came to be known as **PILGRIM FELLOWSHIP**? This movement's name was chosen in 1934; its statement of purpose was adopted in 1935. In 1936, Congregational young people attending the Christian Youth Conference in Lakeside, Ohio, organized the **NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PILGRIM FELLOWSHIP**. Soon afterwards, numerous Conferences, including the Massachusetts Conference, developed their own Pilgrim Fellowship departments. By April 1, 1938, about 40 church youth groups had enrolled in the Pilgrim Fellowship Department of the Massachusetts Conference. In some ways, Pilgrim Fellowship was an outgrowth of the international **CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR** youth movement, founded in 1881 by Congregational minister **DR. FRANCIS E. CLARK** in the Williston Congregational Church of Portland, Maine. In 1939 the **NATIONAL EMBLEM** of Pilgrim Fellowship was adopted. According to the March 1940 edition of the Conference's Pilgrim State News, that emblem, created by Willard Purchase of the Michigan State Pilgrim Fellowship, symbolizes the following: *"Youth stands with the world in his hands, looking at the cross in the light of eternity, and influenced by the church, the home, the school and the factory. Around the central symbols is a circle of blue...[which] stands for the unbroken character of our Fellowship, and for the fact that we are Pilgrims in life, ever seeking to know God better and to serve Him more fully."*

.....About 1936, the Trustees of the Massachusetts Congregational Conference created the position of **WESTERN SECRETARY** of the **CONFERENCE**? This position served about 180 churches in the four western counties of the Commonwealth. It was created to *"bring the churches of Western Massachusetts into closer touch with the Conference and, particularly, to help undergird the work of aided churches."* Rev. George Tuttle served for a decade, as the Conference's first western secretary. This position was the forerunner of the **ASSOCIATE CONFERENCE MINISTER** of the **WESTERN AREA** of the **MACUCC** in 2002.

.....In May 1937, a bill was finally passed in the Massachusetts State Legislature to **EXEMPT CHURCH PARSONAGES** from **STATE TAXATION**, up to the amount of $5,000? Representative Fred Willis of **SAUGUS** was responsible for this bill. In October of that year, he presented both the bill and the quill pen used to sign it, to the Congregational church of **CLIFTONDALE.**

.....**REV. RAY GIBBONS** who served the **FIRST CHURCH in NORTHAMPTON** was said to be the **"FATHER of MASSACHUSETTS CONGREGATIONAL SUMMER CONFERENCES for YOUTH"**? Leader of the Conference's subcommittee for religious education, Gibbons oversaw the Conference's first summer camp in 1938, which had 258 teachers and students.

.....In the late 1930's and early 1940's, there was a movement in the Massachusetts Conference, and apparently across American Congregationalism, to change old style meeting houses into sanctuaries which had a definite **CENTRAL FOCUS** for **WORSHIP**? The visual was now stressed more than the aural, as Conference churches sometimes replaced their traditional central pulpit of Congregationalism with a **SPLIT CHANCEL**. These chancels had a pulpit and a lectern on either side. Also, a wall cross above an altar-table was placed at the center of the chancel, to serve as the worship focus. For some of our churches, this was the first time they used a cross in their worship. When located up front, organ pipes were also hidden, usually behind a cloth, to increase the visual simplicity of this worship setting.

.....An insightful enumeration of the **GREAT TRADITIONS of CONGREGATIONALISM** was given by Dr. R. W. Coe at a meeting of the **WOBURN ASSOCIATION**, likely held near the end of

1941? As reported in the January 1942 edition of the Massachusetts Conference's "Pilgrim State News," those great traditions, evident in the Congregationalism of Massachusetts as well as elsewhere, included: *"evangelism, fellowship in worship, service in the things that count in the world, independent thinking, educational progress, and greatest of all, keeping alive an inner spiritual light, a commitment of the soul to a way of life which redeems the individual and makes that individual a redemptive agency in the society of mankind."* That Woburn Association became a part of the Conference's **METROPOLITAN BOSTON ASSOCIATION**.

.....Within about nine months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, there were 159 Congregational-Christian ministers enlisted as **U.S. MILITARY CHAPLAINS**? This was after a call for the denomination's clergy to leave or take "leaves of absence" from their churches, in order to minister to military personnel during the war. Of these 159 Congregational-Christian chaplains, more than one quarter were from the Massachusetts Conference! At this time, **PILGRIM ASSOCIATION** reported that nearly 25% of its ministers were now serving as military chaplains, which was said to be the highest percentage in any of the Associations in the Conference. The resultant absence of clergy plus other demands of war time, led 136 Conference churches to enter **YOKED** or **FEDERATED RELATIONSHIPS** with each other, as reported in 1943.

.....In 1942 the Massachusetts Conference supported Christian work among **10 DIFFERENT FOREIGN LANGUAGE SPEAKING GROUPS** in the Commonwealth? It was then estimated that 2/3 [!] of the state's population were either born in a foreign country or children of foreign born parents. A 1942 report showed that over the previous year, the Conference had allocated a total of $18,014 for work with the following peoples: Albanian, $1,500; Armenian, $3,786; Finnish, $3,688; French, $1,130; French and Italian, $754; German, $690; Greek, $1,440; Italian, $2,161; Portuguese, $2,024; and Swedish, $444. Some work was also done with Chinese people. In this same time period, the Conference also gave a total of $4,500 to support the work of several of its **AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCHES**. The Conference's support of ministries for churches and individuals of different linguistic, national, ethnic, and racial groups in the Commonwealth, has a long history, some of which goes back to the Massachusetts Home Missionary Society. It was said, in 1945, that there were 22 [!] **SWEDISH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES** in Massachusetts, with a membership of about 3516 people. Many of those churches still offered services in Swedish. In 1943, it was reported that in the denomination as a whole, there were about "425 Congregational-Christian churches among Americans of non-English-speaking heritage." These represented "18 races and nationalities."

.....The Conference's Committee on Moral and Social Welfare called upon Conference clergy, in 1943, to give **1,000 SERMONS/ADDRESSES** on the **PROBLEMS of ALCOHOL** within a period of three months--a virtual "preaching blitz"? Many of these presentations were also to be published in local Massachusetts newspapers. This call reflected a growing concern over the abuse of alcohol during the war period. During the previous year, the arrests of teenage girls for drunkenness was said to have increased 39.9 %. Also, increased absenteeism in American industry due to alcohol abuse was seen as hindering the nation's war effort.

.....As early as 1946, churches of the Massachusetts Conference were asked "on the basis of present information, and without expressing a final judgment" if they were in favor of the **PROPOSED UNION** of The Congregational Christian Churches and **THE EVANGELICAL AND REFORMED CHURCH**? This was meant to be a tentative "straw vote" of churches which wished to express their

view. As of June that year, 157 (26.5%) of the 591 active churches in the Conference had taken a definite vote on the question, with 126 (80.2%) **FAVORING** the union and 31 rejecting it. Of those churches favoring the union, 39 did so by unanimous vote. These results were reported to the General Council of Congregational Christian Churches, which met in Grinnell, Iowa that year. At its 1955 Annual Meeting held in **FITCHBURG**, the Massachusetts Conference essentially re-affirmed its desire for this union, by a vote of 317 (92.8%) FOR, 23 against, and 1 abstention. The following year, in 1956, the General Council finally decided to proceed with that union, by a vote of 1,310 (87.9%) to 179. Thus, in 1957 the **UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST** was formed.

.....In September 1946, the Moderator of the Massachusetts Conference, Lucius Thayer, made a **CHALLENGING COMMENT** about the Conference and its churches, to strengthen their Christian witness together? As Thayer remarked: "*I have a strong conviction that the churches of our faith and order in Massachusetts are not making the impact which their numbers and resources warrant. This is the home of Congregationalism. There are more of our churches in Massachusetts than of any other denomination. Two-fifths of all the members of the Protestant churches in the state belong to our churches. We could be a spiritual powerhouse. And yet, because of our innate modesty and the rugged individualism of many of us, we are all too content to hide our light under a bushel and go our separate ways. If this be true, it follows that we need a new strategy. Together we should do some real planning to meet the needs of our day.*"

.....In 1946, the Massachusetts Congregational Conference and Missionary Society had 21 **ASSOCIATIONS** with a total of **602 CHURCHES**? Those Associations and their number of churches were as follows: Berkshire North (20); Berkshire South (19); Franklin (32); Hampshire (29); Hampden (46); Worcester North (19); Brookfield (17); Worcester Central (30); Middlesex Union (26); Worcester South (16); Middlesex Mendon (26); Andover (24); Woburn (30); Suffolk North (24); Suffolk West (29); Essex North (21); Essex South (36); Suffolk South (38); Old Colony (56); Pilgrim (43); Barnstable (21).

.....In 1947, more than 200 of the Conference's churches celebrated **LAYMAN'S SUNDAY** and most of those did so on Sunday, October 17? Apparently, honoring the role of laity in Christ's Church and setting aside a special Sunday to honor them, was now a growing movement in the Massachusetts Conference, as well as among Congregationalists nationally.

....In the statistics for 1947, contained in the 1949 Year Book of the **EVANGELICAL AND REFORMED CHURCH** denomination, it is shown that there were **TWO E & R CHURCHES** in Massachusetts? These were **CHRIST CHURCH** in **JAMAICA PLAIN** with 125 members, and **ST. ANDREWS CHURCH** in **HOLYOKE** with 121 members. In that same year, there were ten E & R churches in Connecticut---Bridgeport (3), Fairfield, South Norwalk, Wallingford, New Haven, Shelton, Torrington, and Warrenville--with a total membership of 1,977 adults. No E & R churches are listed for the other New England states.

.....At its Annual Meeting in 1948, Massachusetts Conference delegates unanimously passed a resolution urging the Conference's churches to work with the **PLANNED PARENTHOOD LEAGUE** to change a longstanding Commonwealth law? At this point, Massachusetts was one of only two U.S. states in which medical doctors were legally prohibited from dispensing **CONTRACEPTIVE INFORMATION**, even to married women whose lives or health would be put at risk by pregnancy. A

state referendum on this issue was to be held on November 2 of this year. It is said that the referendum's call to legalize Massachusetts doctors to give such information at least to married women at risk, was then supported by almost 1,000 Massachusetts clergy and over 3,000 resident members of the Massachusetts Medical Society. The referendum question as it would appear in the ballot, as well as the Conference's Annual Meeting recommendation to vote **"YES"** on it, were published in the November 1948 issue of the Conference's Pilgrim State News edition of "The Missionary Herald At Home and Abroad."

.....The Massachusetts Conference first acquired its **FRAMINGHAM CONFERENCE CENTER** in the summer of 1950 and that **5,000 [!] PEOPLE** were expected to be present for its dedication on May 13, 1951? This property contained about 130 acres of land.

.....The Massachusetts Conference was said to have had **the FIRST PROTESTANT COMMUNION SERVICE** ever **TELEVISED**? This candlelight service apparently took place in 1951 at the **WILBRAHAM PILGRIM FELLOWSHIP** summer camp program, run under the auspices of the Conference that year.

.....In 1954 it was reported that the Massachusetts Conference owned 28% of all the **INVESTED FUNDS** held by Congregational Christian conferences across America? Continuing this comparison, it was said that the Massachusetts Conference had: 10% of the churches, 15% of the **TOTAL MEMBERSHIP**, 14% of Church School enrollment, and 20% of the property values. Also, it gave 10% of the Benevolence Gifts and 14% of the funding for Christian World Mission. However, over the course of a year, the churches of the Massachusetts Conference averaged a gain of only 1 new member, for every 79 church members.

.....In 1954, about six months before the U. S. Senate finally condemned the behavior of Senator Joseph McCarthy, which came to be known derogatorily as **"MCCARTHYISM,"** the delegates of the Massachusetts Conference adopted a significant **RESOLUTION** on **"CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES"**? This resolution contained the following statements: *"One of the basic concepts of our religious faith is that man is a son of God, made in the image of God and therefore worthy of the respect of other men and of a chance to live his life with dignity and freedom. We hold that loyalty to this basic truth is necessary to preserve political freedom as set forth in the American Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights. Moved by this faith **WE DEPLORE INTIMIDATION, CARELESS ACCUSATIONS, ABUSE OF POLITICAL POWER**, release of unevaluated information in committee files, malicious slander, premature assumption of guilt, the judgment of people on the basis of association rather than character and conduct. Such practices violate our religious convictions, our democratic traditions, and our constitutional rights and liberties...We believe that society profits from diversity of opinion, from the interplay of free minds and from the use of truth to counteract error. An atmosphere of confidence and freedom in our churches, schools, libraries, industries and in our institutions of government is a necessary condition for a strong and secure nation."* This resolution was passed on May 19 at **BETHANY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH** in **QUINCY** which hosted this Annual Meeting.

.....In 1957, members of the Massachusetts Conference played key roles in **RE-CREATING** the **FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH in AMERICA**? At that time, the modern simulation of Plymouth in 1627, known as **"PLIMOTH PLANTATION**," was being developed. In response to a

request from the developers, Conference members took responsibility for overseeing the re-creation of the Pilgrim's first meeting house, as well as raising the $25,000 needed for that project. The Pilgrims used their first meeting house as a storehouse and a fort, as well as a place for their worship. Successfully re-created, this meeting house of rough hewn logs, now stands on top of the hill, at the head of the stockade fences laid out in the shape of a diamond, which contain the Plantation's re-created Pilgrim settlement. At the entry door of this re-created meeting house, there is said to be a plaque which reads: *"This replica of the original Fort-Meetinghouse is given by American Congregationalists in memory of their spiritual ancestors who began the Congregational way and founded in such a building the first Congregational church in America."* Ministers from **THE CHURCH OF THE PILGRIMAGE** in **PLYMOUTH** and the **CHESTNUT STREET CHURCH** in **WORCESTER** chaired the committees which made this meeting house re-creation possible.

.....A **CLERGY SHORTAGE** was a serious concern of the Massachusetts Conference, at its 1957 Annual Meeting held at the **FIRST CHURCH IN NEWTON**? Reflecting on this concern of the meeting, the editor of "Pilgrim State News," the Conference's newsletter, wrote the following in its June 1957 edition: *"There is no doubt about the fact that there is a shortage of ministers that threatens to plunge the churches into a leadership crisis such as they have not known since colonial times...Until churches are ready to do something radical and bold in the way of consolidation or a shared ministry at least many of them have no right to expect an intelligent, well-trained youth to get excited about the ministry there. This silly climate of opinion that pervades most churches to the effect that a parish minister's capacity to minister is **OVER AT AGE 45-55** will have to be properly dealt with also....Seeing the Christian ministry through the eyes of the church people probably has more to do with whether or not youth is drawn to the parish ministry or other church vocations, than any appeals--vocal, statistical, or other."* The Korean War had ended in 1953. In view of the above, it's ironic that 1957 was the peak year of the "Baby Boom" in America; 4.3 million births took place that year.

.....In 1960, the Massachusetts Conference welcomed Rev. Dr. Proculo A. Rodriguez and his wife, from the Republic of the Philippines, as its **FIRST "MISSIONARIES TO MASSACHUSETTS"**? Massachusetts Congregationalists have a long history of sending missionaries to others in distant lands. But, this year, for the first time, missionaries from afar came to us. The Rodriguezes came to share their faith experiences and Christian insights with churches and groups in the Massachusetts Conference. Dr. Rodriguez was *"one of the first bishops of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines."* He was also a leader in literacy and translation work. Mrs. Rodriguez was a former President of the National Women's Association of the United Church of Christ. Since this historic visit of the Rodriquezes, the Conference sponsored and benefitted from the visits of several other missionaries from afar.

.....By January 1, 1962, 74.7% of the reported 5,402 Congregational Christian churches in America had voted to **JOIN** the **UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**, whose Constitution had finally been adopted in July 1961? Those joining represented **83.4 % of all Congregational Christians in America**. 428 (about 7.9%) Congregational Christian churches voted "not" to join--of these about half were "without regular pastoral service." 917 (about 16.9%) Congregational Christian churches did not vote--of these, most were relatively small churches and 58% of them did not have regular ministers. All Evangelical and Reformed churches joined the United Church of Christ. At this early point, Congregational Christians brought 4,057 churches representing 1,197,819 members to the UCC; whereas, Evangelical

and Reformed Christians brought 2,718 churches representing 817,951 members to it. **The Congregational Christian contribution to the newly created UCC was, at this point, about 59.4% of its members and 60% of its churches**. Also, the areas with the highest percentage of Congregational Christian churches joining the UCC were: Puerto Rico (100%), Northern California (94%), Nebraska (91%), Middle Atlantic Conference (90.3%), and Florida (88.2%).

.....On July 5, 1963, delegates to the United Church of Christ's Fourth General Synod meeting, held in Denver, passed a resolution which the Conference's "Pilgrim State News" characterized as **"A CLARION CALL FOR RACIAL JUSTICE NOW"**? That October 1963 edition of the "News" went on to say, that this resolution *"...electrified the whole Christian world. News of it spread like wildfire. Never has there been such a clear call for racial justice at whatever cost."* This resolution urged the denomination's churches to work for racial justice, and to support the denomination's work in this area by taking up emergency "Racial Justice Now" offerings--beginning in October of this year. Many Massachusetts Conference churches responded to these challenges, including the **UNITED CHURCH IN SHIRLEY**, the **UNION CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH of GROTON**, and the **CHRISTIAN UNION CHURCH of WEST GROTON**. To express their Christian social witness, these congregations set aside time in one of their Fall worship services to write letters to their legislators, urging that strong civil rights laws be enacted in America. The Shirley congregation wrote over 50 such letters; the two Groton churches wrote over 60.

.....At the Massachusetts Conference's 1964 Annual Meeting, held in **PITTSFIELD**, the majority of delegates voted for a resolution on **CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE** and for a resolution which, in essence, supported the Supreme Court's 1962 rejection of **TEACHER-LED PRAYER** and **BIBLE READING** in **AMERICA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS**? About 83% voted for the first resolution, which asserted that Christians should obey God, not human beings in situations where there is wrong or injustice--such as in cases [then taking place in America] of Civil Rights demonstrators protesting unjust laws. It was suggested that the Annual Meeting vote on this resolution might have been closer to unanimous, if the title of this resolution had specified Christian Civil Disobedience. About 71% voted for the second resolution, which opposed the so-called "Becker Amendment." Introduced in Congress in 1963, that amendment sought [though unsuccessfully, ultimately] to counteract the 1962 Supreme Court ruling, by allowing for voluntary state-prescribed prayer in public schools.

.....The first person in the Massachusetts Conference to be recognized as a **COMMISSIONED WORKER** in the **UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST** was Julouise Paulsen? Julouise was commissioned by the **MIDDLESEX UNION ASSOCIATION** on January 3, 1965 at the **PILGRIM CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH** in **LEOMINSTER**. She had served as the Director of Christian Education at the Leominster church since 1963. This "Commissioned Worker" status, which authorized lay persons for special ministries in UCC churches, was a new one at this time. That status was later referred to as **"COMMISSIONED MINISTER"** in the **UCC**.

.....**ALBERT J. PENNER**, then Conference Minister, attended the funeral of **REV. JAMES REEB** in Selma, Alabama. Rev. Reeb was a Unitarian Universalist minister, a community relations director of the Boston Metropolitan Housing Program, and a Civil Rights activist. At the age of 38, Rev. Reeb joined protests in Selma for **AFRICAN AMERICAN VOTERS' RIGHTS** and was severely beaten with clubs by white segregationists, leading to Reeb's death on March 11, 1965. Rev. Penner walked 8 blocks in a crowd of thousands led by **MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.**, to lay a wreathe on the Selma

courthouse door in memory of Rev. Reeb. It was a court-sanctioned peaceful demonstration. A nun told Penner that one of the armed troopers had told her this: *"Well, Sister, we know that whether you march or don't march, we've had it."*

.....The Massachusetts Conference's Annual Meeting held on May 1966 in **SPRINGFIELD**, was the first such Annual Meeting to have **OFFICIAL OBSERVERS** present from **ROMAN CATHOLIC** and **OTHER RELIGIOUS GROUPS** in **MASSACHUSETTS**? Invited by the Conference's Committee on Christian Unity, these observers represented Roman Catholic, Baptist, Episcopal, Methodist, and Greek Orthodox religious bodies.

.....At the Conference's **1966 ANNUAL MEETING**, 670 (92.6% ) delegates voted to change the Conference's name, from the Massachusetts Congregational Christian Conference to the **MASSACHUSETTS CONFERENCE** of the **UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**? This change became official, after it was confirmed by the Commonwealth's Secretary of State.

.....In January 1967, the MACUCC sponsored a **PILGRIM FELLOWSHIP TRIP** to **ENGLAND**.

.....Two resolutions proposed at the MACUCC's Annual Meeting in June 1967 were highly controversial. One of those resolutions dealt with **SELECTIVE CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION** and the other on **PEACE AND JUSTICE IN VIETNAM**. As the June 1967 edition of the Conference's *"Pilgrim State News"* publication reported, *"It was finally decided that the group would not take any votes on the resolutions although the Social Action Committee had intended to get a response by voting. . . [the first resolution called] for a change in the selective service act . . . [it] urged that conscientious objection to a particular war be permitted. The Vietnam proposal urged that the United States and North Vietnam find ways to cease the present escalation of the war, and that ways of bringing peace, justice, and economic recovery to Vietnam be implemented immediately. It was not planned to bring the resolutions before the whole conference for a vote due to the lack of time in the business session. . .The lack of enthusiastic support for these resolutions and the move not to vote on them even in the interest section caused the Rev. Charles Lemert of Needham to comment critically, 'We have taken a stand today against taking a stand.'"*

.....That shortly after the death of **REV. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.** in April 1968, a special memorial service was held for him at **ST. JOHN'S UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST** in **SPRINGFIELD**, Massachusetts– one of the Conference's churches. As the May 1968 edition of the Conference's newspaper, *"Pilgrim State News"* reported: ***"THE KING IS DEAD, WHAT ABOUT HIS DREAM?"*** *Dr. Albert C. Pryor, Jr., a deacon at St. John's United Church of Christ in Springfield, gave the following prayer in a memorial service for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on Palm Sunday morning at St. John's. Dr. King had been shot in Memphis, Tenn., April 4, three days earlier. The prayer:*

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*Eternal God and Father of all men, Thou who giveth life and taketh it away, we come to Thee, Father, in this hour of national crisis because we have sinned against our fellowmen, and therefore against Thee. The evils of our actions now threaten to destroy that system of shared understandings which constitutes the very fabric of our society and makes possible a community among men. Thank you, Father, for two men who lived and walked among us. One lived more than two thousand years ago; the other was with us until only yesterday. Both men had a single dream and a common purpose. One man*

*required 33 years to complete his mission, the other 39.*

[**NOTE:** On January 1, 2020 the **MASSACHUSETTS CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST** joined with the **CONNECTICUT** and **RHODE ISLAND** Conferences of the UCC to form the **SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**.]

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**THE END**

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